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PROGRAM The Today Show STATION WRC-TV
NBC Network

DATE June 12, 1984 7:00 AM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Interview with David MacMichael

JOHN PALMER: Is U.S. policy in Central America based on outdated intelligence information?

That's the question being asked after a former CIA man broke his silence and went public this week.

David MacMichael spent two years inside the CIA analyzing political and military developments in Central America, and he now accuses his former employer, the CIA, of bending the truth to support Reagan Administration policy. Mr. MacMichael is with us this morning in our Washington studios.

Good morning.

DAVID MacMICHAEL: Good morning.

PALMER: How do you feel that the CIA is bending the truth or not telling the truth?

MacMICHAEL: I think you'll recall the report, the evaluation of intelligence reports by the Subcommittee of the House Select Committee on Intelligence in September of 1982 in which these accusations, if you will, were made, that much of the intelligence presented to the Committee appeared to have been designed to support the policy rather than to look to a unique situation, and I agree with that.

PALMER: Specifically, what are we talking about here? What charges?

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Approved For Release 2008/09/18 : CIA-RDP88-01070R000201240003-8

MacMICHAEL: Well, basically, the charges I'm concerned with are those within Administration rhetoric are -- are of a massive and continuing flow of arms from Nicaragua to support the insurgency in El Salvador, and while there's abundant evidence -- and this is admitted by the Nicaraguan government that -- Nicaraguan territory and some Nicaraguan government personnel are indeed involved in the transfer and transshipment of arms into El Salvador in a period, roughly, from the fall of 1980 to the early spring of 1981. Since that date there has been, in my opinion, no -- no verifiable evidence to support these charges.

PALMER: How do you know that, that there's been no transfer of weapons and arms to El Salvador through Nicaragua?

MacMICHAEL: One relies here chiefly on negative evidence. The -- as I say, the evidence was abundant up until the spring of 1981, and yet since that time there's not been one single interception of one of these alleged shipments.

PALMER: Mr. MacMichael, some of your former associates in the CIA -- those still there -- say that you really weren't privy to a lot of high intelligence information, that you were not high enough on the scale at the Agency to really know about such things.

MacMICHAEL: Well, I -- I really rather reject that. I believe that I have seen at least a broad, deep sample of the evidence on -- on which the Agency relies and which has been presented to the Congress.

PALMER: As recently as a month-and-a-half ago, President Reagan said that the Soviets are flooding the area with weapons. Does he have bad information?

MacMICHAEL: Ah -- ah, the President, I think, often uses rather imprecise rhetoric and this, of course, is one of the things that makes the -- the evidence suspect when one hears these terms of massive flooding, and so forth, without reference to specific amounts.

PALMER: Why did you decide to go public with is? Why didn't you work within the CIA and stay with the CIA?

MacMICHAEL: Well, in response to your last question, when my two-year contract ended in April of 1983, I left the Agency. I was -- the contract was not extended. I think I would have preferred to stay within in the Agency and -- and work on this, because I made my -- my position very clear while I was there.

Since I've left, as you know, I've traveled several times to Nicaragua to get a feel for the situation on the ground there or exactly the nature of the regime as one can find by visiting a country, talking with its people, and I've become convinced that -- that pursuit of the Administration's policy is fraught with very great dangers not only for the Central American region but for the United States itself.

PALMER: What do you think the Administration wants to do in Nicaragua? Are we trying to overthrow the regime there, in your view?

MacMICHAEL: In my view, I do believe that is the ultimate purpose of the -- of the policy, yes.

PALMER: And what do you hope to accomplish by going public now and talking about these things?

MacMICHAEL: Well, what I would like to do is to have this issue fully debated. I would like to see the evidence on which the Administration relies put forward in a visible manner so that -- so that this -- this policy can be reconsidered, and this is especially important, I believe, in an election year.

PALMER: Thank you very much, David MacMichael, former analyst with the CIA, for talking about this situation in Central America. Thanks for being with us.